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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. CONAWAY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
July 25, 2005.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MICHAEL K. CONAWAY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) for 5 minutes.

MEDICAL LIABILITY CRISIS

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today again to remind my colleagues of the importance of passing a Medical Liability Reform bill on the floor of the House this week.

I would like to submit for the record and read a brief section of a news story from my district. These type of stories have become common in the media in my area over the past few years.

I quote, "One doctor who has been treating patients in Bethalto for more than 20 years is moving his practice to another state."

"The rate increases are forcing some doctors in Madison County to take their practices elsewhere. That is the case for Dr. Charles Sammis, who took over his father's practice 20 years ago.

"It would be so nice if I could stay here, but the way it is it is impossible." Dr. Sammis has been treating patients at his family practice in Godfrey for 20 years. Friday was his last day.

Dr. Sammis says the rising medical malpractice insurance rates in Madison County have forced him out. He is not alone. The whole Madison County area, I think there is maybe two or three left and everybody else has pretty much either retired or left.

Meantime, Dr. Sammis' departure has been especially hard on his patients. "You have all been nice to me and I appreciate it," he is quoted as saying. Dr. Sammis and his family are moving to Wisconsin where he plans to open another practice.

I would urge my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 5 this week. To stay competitive in the global marketplace and keep jobs in America, we need to ensure that our health care delivery system is fully intact.

BETHALTO DOCTOR CLOSES OFFICE DUE TO RISING MEDICAL MALPRACTICE RATES (By Erin O'Neill)

The debate continues over rising medical malpractice insurance costs and who's to blame. Some doctors in Madison County, Illinois say the jump in insurance premiums has forced them to close their offices.

One doctor, who has been treating patients in Bethalto for more than 20 years, is moving his practice to another state.

While medical malpractice is a problem all across the U.S., a recent report from the American Tort Reform Association suggested its especially common in the Metro East. Some say frivolous lawsuits are to blame, others say it is price gouging by the insurance companies.

The rate increases are forcing some doctors in Madison County to take their practices elsewhere. That's the case for Dr. Charles Sammis, who took over his father's practice 20 years ago.

"It would be so nice if I could stay here, but the way it is, it's impossible." Dr. Sammis has been treating patients at his family practice in Godfrey for 20 years. Friday was his last day.

Dr. Sammis says the rising medical malpractice insurance rates in Madison County have forced him out. He's not alone, "The whole Madison County area I think there's maybe two to three left and everybody else has pretty much either retired or left."

Dr. Sammis says frivolous lawsuits are to blame. Not so, says former Missouri Insurance Commissioner Jay Angoff, "The insurance companies are telling the doctors look over here its their fault when it's the insurance companies themselves."

Angoff says malpractice rates have more than doubled in the last five years, while the amount of money paid in claims actually dropped, so he says lawsuits aren't the problem. "So, there is no justification for premiums going up the way they are. And, if I were a doctor in Illinois I would call ISME up, that's a major malpractice insurer in Illinois, and say 'Why are my premiums going up when claim payments are going down?'"

But Dr. Sammis still believes needless litigation is behind the escalating costs and hopes tort reform is a solution. In May, Illinois lawmakers approved a plan to cap lawsuit awards in medical malpractice cases, but the bill remains on the Governors desk. "And we were hoping that our Governor would sign the bill and he's still waiting on it. And I know there's a lot of issues with that, but its getting very difficult to practice medicine here right now."

Meantime, Dr. Sammis' departure has been especially hard on his patients, "You've all been nice to me and I appreciate it."

Bob Vieregge has been going to Dr. Sammis for 20 years, "I told him the other day I said I lost my wife and I lost my priest and good friend and now I'm losing my doctor." Patient Mary Stanton says. "We just wish him all the best of everything where he's going."

Angoff says insurance companies in both Illinois and Missouri are notorious for very weak insurance regulation. He says insurance companies can raise rates at will and the insurance commissioner can't do anything about it. He says the solution is for local doctors to rally behind legislation that requires insurance companies to get the approval of the commissioner before raising rates.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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